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Whirlwinds and Winds of the Spirit – A Message from Rev. June Boutwell

Some folks may be familiar with the story of Elijah taken up in the whirlwind and ascending into heaven leaving Elisha to continue the ministry of advising the leaders of the people. However in the last few weeks it has been more like Randy traveling down the road and the whirlwind staying behind to accompany me as I am immersed in this ministry and try to fill the role of advising leaders and fellow prophets as we embark upon this new part of the journey.

The office I occupy by your vote is Designated Conference Minister. It is a particular ministry described in the call agreement in this way: to become our pastor and teacher for a period of three years….During this time we ask that you lead us in a process of visioning, planning, and preparing a road map for our future, as described in the section "Where We Are Headed" from our Conference profile….At the end of the designated term, the Conference Board of Directors may elect to extend this call for up to two additional years in order to complete the work of building a new structure or preparing the way for new ministerial leadership. As the psalmist says, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:18-20). We have much work to do together

with great perception, deep compassion, abundant love, and unceasing prayer. I look forward to all the gifts, skills, talents, dreams, vision, and passion that will be shared over the next few years as we travel this road.

I am so appreciative of the hospitality of the folks of the Southeast Conference as I came in February to be called to this position of Designated Conference Minister and for Randy and Karen's abundant hospitality. I had the gift of spending three days with Randy after the meeting on February 1 to listen to and learn from Randy about this ministry. Gerri, Debbie, Sarah and Chris have been very generous with their time and patience as I have learned more about how the staff functions and the responsibilities and procedures of this office.

I began with three days of meetings with other Conference Ministers my first week and then arrived in the office on March 3. I have now had time to review about 300 emails waiting for me upon my arrival and have returned calls to all the voice messages left on the phone. I have had the opportunity to worship with Emmanuel UCC in Greenville and meet Pastor Holly Kendall. I have also been in worship with Central in Atlanta, First Congregational in Birmingham, and Decatur UCC just down the road from my cozy little apartment. I had the privilege of being present as Kim Sorrells was ordained at Central in Atlanta.

Rev. Rodney Franklin, First Congregational Birmingham, welcoming new members Barbara and Lisa during worship February 2, 2014

I also worshipped with Beloved Community in Birmingham as they recover from the damage the church building received in a storm on February 21. (See the article in this newsletter for more information about that situation.) Your prayers are invited for this congregation and Pastor Angie Wright as they worship at a United Methodist church around the corner for a few more weeks. And I got to know our UCC Insurance agent by the end of my first week here. It is all about the connections, both needful and joyful.

I have met with the Commission on Ministry and have already been working with several churches who are in the search process. My hope is to meet with all the committees of searching churches in the next few weeks. Many folks have already been in contact with me regarding church visits and questions about life and ministry in the Southeast Conference. And I am looking forward to continuing to work with

Piedmont College and Rev. Glenna Shepherd and Decatur UCC as our hosting church for the Southeast Conference Annual Meeting on June 20-21. We are also exploring the possibility of having a one day clergy retreat on June 19 as a pre-meeting gathering. In the coming weeks I look forward to with First United Church in Belvidere TN and Pilgrim in Chattanooga and Pleasant Hill Community Church and the community at Uplands Village.

Rev. Glenna Shepherd giving the benediction after worship at Decatur UCC, February 9, 2014

I am encouraged by the warm welcome and sincere desire of folks as they reach out offering their prayers, wishes, hopes, and dreams and asking important questions about their congregation or their ministry. It is indeed an exciting time and I hope that the whirlwind will blow away some of the dust and cobwebs and bring fresh new winds of the Spirit among us as I get my feet on the ground and begin to walk alongside you all as we journey together toward the future that God imagines for this place and time.

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